



Washing your hands: Doing it right*

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. It is best to wash your hands with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds. However, if soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product to clean your hands. Alcohol-based hand rubs significantly reduce the number of germs on skin and are fast acting.

When washing hands with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with clean running water and apply soap. Use warm water if it is available.
- Rub hands together to make a lather and scrub all surfaces.
- Continue rubbing hands for 20 seconds. Need a timer? Imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice through to a friend!
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer. If possible, use your paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Remember: If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based gel to clean hands.

When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

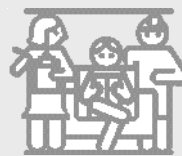
- Apply product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub hands together.
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

When you should wash your hands:

- Before preparing or eating food.
- After going to the bathroom.
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom.
- Before and after tending to someone who is sick.
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- After handling an animal or animal waste.
- After handling garbage.
- Before and after treating a cut or wound.

*Adapted from: Clean Hands Save Lives! from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/cleanhands/>



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This information is prepared specifically for patients participating in clinical research at the Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health and is not necessarily applicable to individuals who are patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your healthcare team.

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